

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF CERTIFIED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE FACILITIES

Background

The District has had a strong commitment to expanding access to quality early childhood education and care (ECE), a commitment that is challenged by available quality classroom space and facilities. Even though the District has one of the highest access rates for children eligible for childcare subsidies,¹ the demand and need for additional certified space for early childhood programming is well-documented for both three- and four-year old children as well as for quality infant care. The high numbers of single parent families and the large percentage of children who live in poverty are not matched with program space in neighborhoods, particularly in areas of extreme need. Parents who are high school students or who need to work struggle to place their children in safe, licensed child care centers and programs that are convenient to their homes.

At the same time, the District has both undeveloped or underutilized space in public schools and other city-owned space. Recent policy mandates, from both the Council and the Board of Education, make clear that there is a priority need to use underutilized space in District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) by making it available for community needs.

The Mayor's approach to expanding the number of certified early childhood education and care facilities will consist of the following: increasing space within existing facilities in order to serve children enrolled in DCPS, community-based organizations (CBOs), and charter school ECE programs; providing incentives to office developers to build early childcare centers within the city's business district; and exploring model programs from outside of the District that could be adopted here.

Increase space in public schools

The District has a neighborhood-based public education system, and its school facilities have in the past and could in the future serve as community centers. This neighborhood system makes many DCPS facilities ideally located for early childhood education and care programs. Furthermore, both DCPS and CBO providers understand the value in developing early childhood classrooms in existing school buildings. As educators who will serve neighborhood children when they enter pre-kindergarten, DCPS administrators want to ensure that these children have a strong start, which means increasing the number of high quality early childhood centers, particularly those that serve infants and toddlers. Moreover, as young professionals move into DC and

¹ Sixty-eight percent of eligible children received subsidies in 2005, while the national average is estimated to be between 15 and 20 percent (Testimony of Barbara Ferguson Kamara, before the U.S. Congress, Committee on Human Services).

decide to raise a family in the District, school administrators have seen an increased demand for childcare centers.

DCPS reports that 15 elementary school principals have requested authorization to open early childhood education and care programs to accommodate three year olds. Funding for operating these programs could be covered by Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF), which provides a 1.38 multiplier to cover the smaller student-to-teacher ratio necessary for early childhood education. These programs have specific facilities requirements that need to be met in order to meet standards of the accrediting body, including providing 35 square feet per child in classrooms for three year olds.² The costs of bringing elementary facilities up to early education and care standards will be considered in the capital planning involving both school modernization and city capital funds. Over the next six months the Executive Office of the Mayor will review the DCPS Master Facilities Plan to identify opportunities for including ECE centers (operated by CBO or DCPS providers) in future school modernization plans.

Charter school ECE programs

The District's public charter schools also are responding to the demand for early childhood education and care programs. Over 300 ECE slots will be added this fall to currently-operating charter schools. Like in DCPS, the cost of these slots would be covered by funds from the UPSFF. Furthermore, each charter school providing ECE programs could use its facilities allowance to purchase or lease new space and to upgrade facilities to meet certification standards. As a policy priority, the Mayor will encourage and facilitate the lease of space by charter schools in surplus school buildings in the District's facility inventory and in neighborhood DCPS schools where appropriate.

Incentives to businesses

Currently there is a great deal of office development taking place in the central business section of the District. Several reports have shown that providing child care to office employees in the place of work is advantageous to the employer in terms of worker productivity and satisfaction. It is equally beneficial to employees because it gives them an opportunity to participate in the center activities and reduces the time it takes to commute home. As is done in other areas such as housing, the Mayor will consider providing incentives, including tax incentives, to businesses for setting aside space for ECE centers.

² Additional requirements are listed in the facilities checklist available through the office of Early Childhood at DCPS.

Educare

In addition to increasing the number of ECE classrooms and slots, the Administration is exploring both purpose-built facilities and the adoption of exemplar programs. One such program is the Educare model of delivering service to families and children in high poverty communities. Educare is a multi-service approach to addressing the needs of families and young children; in addition to early care and education, Educare centers provide health, mental health, parenting, and family support services. All services are provided in one physical space designed and built specifically to provide these services. The Educare approach requires the construction or revitalization of facilities that meet their philosophical orientation. The Administration will engage in conversation with potential funders and the community at large regarding the viability of bringing this model to the District.